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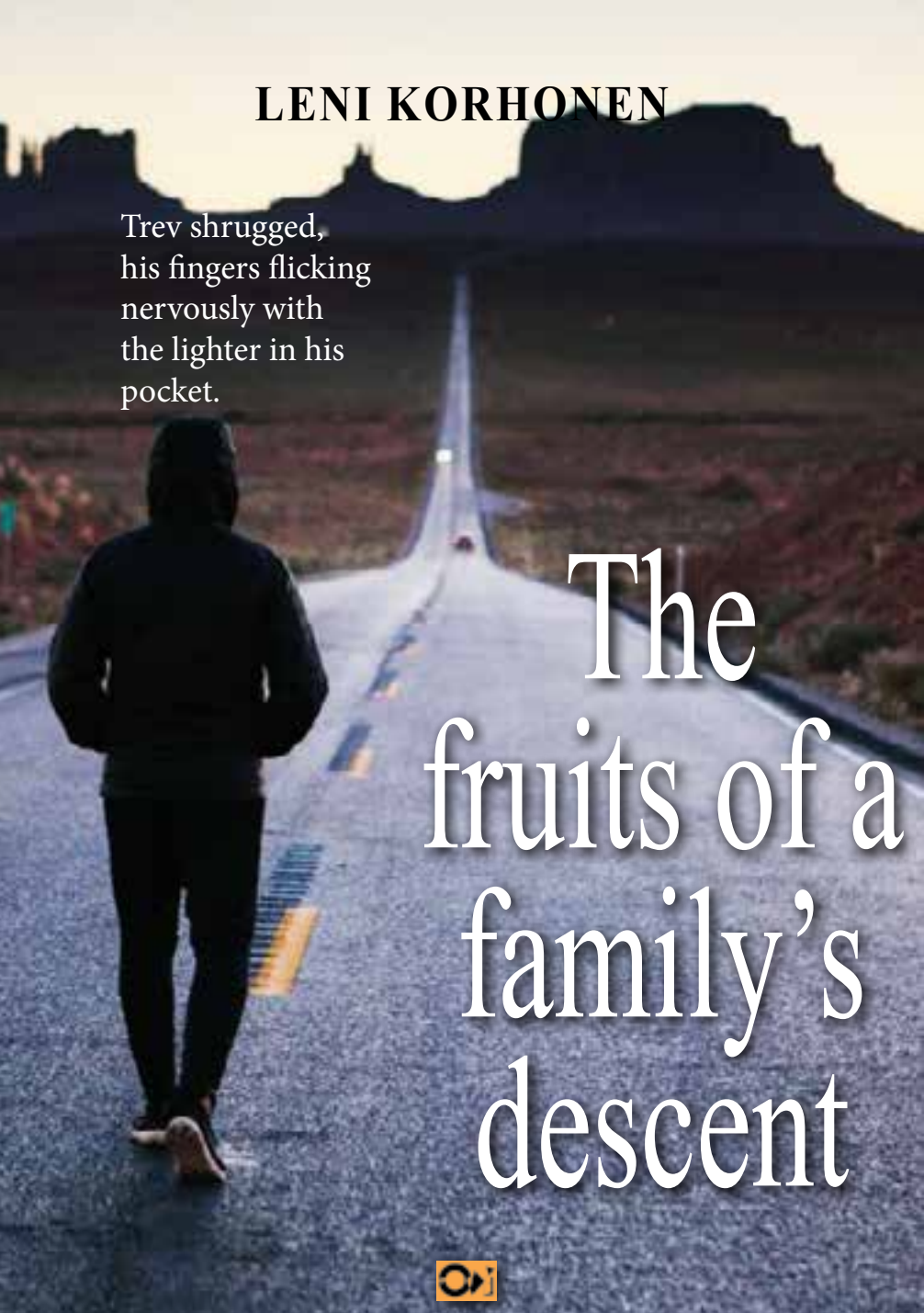

Trev shrugged, his fingers flicking nervously with the lighter in his pocket.

The fruits of a family's descent

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Leni Korhonen

The fruits of a family's descent

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The door to the Wilson family home creaked open, and in walked Trev, his face a picture of weary indifference. His mother, Anne, was in the kitchen, stirring a pot of soup that had long since lost its scent of fresh ingredients, now thickened with the heaviness of a thousand untold worries. She looked up, her eyes dull from sleepless nights, as Trev kicked off his shoes and dropped his keys on the hallway table.

"Late again?" Anne's voice quivered, but she wasn't sure whether the tremor was from concern or exhaustion.

Trev shrugged, his fingers flicking nervously with the lighter in his pocket. "Had a lot to do at the shop, Mom."

The truth was, the "shop" had become a place to hide, a place where the weight of the world could drown beneath the noise of the cash register and the hum of the refrigerators. But Anne knew better than to ask too many questions.

From the corner of the room, Mr. Wilson, an aging man whose hair had thinned and face grown sullen from worry, leaned against the doorframe. He said nothing, but his eyes followed Trev, the same unspoken question hanging between them. *When will he stop?*

"I'll be fine, Dad," Trev muttered, his voice distant as he tossed his jacket onto the couch.

Anne stood in silence, her fingers clenching the wooden spoon. "It's been months, Trev. How much longer are we going to pretend everything's normal?"

Mr. Wilson pushed off from the doorframe and crossed the room. "You think I don't know?" His voice was sharp, cutting the quiet air. "I run a business, a small one at that. You work in it, but you're hardly there. We're not stupid."

Trev's face tightened. He felt the familiar rush of anger rise within him, but his chest was hollow, his

words empty. "I'm doing my best," he said, though his voice cracked. He looked at his father's face, the same one that used to be full of pride. Now there was only sorrow.

Anne put down the spoon and walked over to Trev. She placed her hand on his arm, as if to hold him steady, but her touch was cold. "Trev, please. We love you. You can come back to us."

Trev stepped back from her, shaking his head. "I'm not like you. I can't just walk away from this."

Mr. Wilson stepped forward, his voice rising. "You think it's easy for me? I'm fighting to keep this family afloat, and you're throwing it all away for ...what? What's it all for?"

"I'm not throwing anything away," Trev said, his voice strained. He moved toward the door, but Anne caught his arm.

"Where are you going?" she asked, her eyes pleading.

Trev looked at his mother. The man who used to be a son, full of potential and promise, was now a shadow in front of her. "To get away from this."

Without another word, he turned and left the house, the door slamming behind him with a finality that echoed through the house.

The cracks appear

The rain had been coming down in sheets all afternoon, an endless torrent that battered the windows of Wilson's Grocery Store, the sound of it a constant drumbeat that seemed to echo through the very bones of the building. The store, which had once been a beacon of warmth and community, now felt cold and hollow, like a place forgotten by time. It was as if the rain had seeped into the walls and the floors, bringing with it a sense of doom that couldn't be shaken.

Trev pushed open the door, the familiar creak of the old hinges sending a shiver through his spine. It wasn't just the cold that chilled him, but the weight of what he was about to face. The smell of aging bread, overripe vegetables, and the faint scent of cleaning products filled the air, mingling with the heavy scent

of wet earth from his damp clothes. He could hear the dull hum of the refrigerator in the back of the store, the only sound besides the rhythm of the rain outside.

His father was there, as always, hunched over the counter, his face hidden behind a pile of ledgers. The faint scratch of pen on paper was the only sound in the otherwise silent room. Trev paused for a moment, letting his eyes wander over the shelves, the rows of cans, the bags of rice. He knew it all too well, the way the store was laid out, the things his father had been selling for years. The same cans of beans, the same boxes of cereal. It all felt like a prison to him now.

"Late again," Mr. Wilson said, his voice cutting through the silence, sharp and resentful. He didn't even look up from the ledger, but there was no mistaking the disappointment in his words. It hung in the air like smoke, thick and suffocating.

Trev let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding, a hollow, defeated sound. He leaned against the counter, rubbing his damp hands together. The cool metal felt foreign against his skin, and he hated it. He hated everything about being here, but he couldn't seem to leave.

"It's been busy," he muttered, trying to find some excuse, any excuse. "Can't help it."

His eyes drifted over the familiar surroundings, the way the store seemed to close in on him, its cramped aisles and low ceilings. It was all too small, too confined. And yet, it was the only place left that still felt like something real. Or at least, it had been. He didn't know anymore.

"Busy?" Mr. Wilson's voice was low, laced with scepticism. Finally, he looked up, his eyes hard and tired, the years of struggle written deep into the lines of his face. "You've been busy for the last six months, Trev. Busy doesn't mean anything. It's just another excuse."

Trev opened his mouth to say something, but no words came. He had nothing to say. Not anymore.

"This business, this family…" Mr. Wilson's voice broke for just a moment, and for the briefest of seconds, Trev saw something flicker in his father's eyes, something human, something real. But it was gone as quickly as it had come, replaced by the cold mask of the man who had been fighting for this small grocery store for decades. "We've been holding it together with tape, and you keep tearing it apart."

Trev's jaw tightened, but he didn't respond. He couldn't. How could he? What was left to say? The guilt ate at him, gnawed at him from the inside. He couldn't even meet his father's gaze, so he stared down at his own shoes, his fingers clenching around the edge of the counter.

"I can't keep doing this," Mr. Wilson said, his voice softer now, but it only made the words that much more devastating. "I've worked my whole life to build this and you..." His voice cracked, and he stopped, his breath coming in short, angry bursts.

Trev winced at the sound of his father's voice breaking, but he still couldn't find the words. He felt like a coward, like a man who had failed not only his father but the entire family. He wasn't sure what he was trying to do anymore. It had all become a blur, a cycle of late nights, empty promises, and the slow, creeping feeling that he was losing everything that had ever mattered.

"I'm trying," Trev finally said, his voice cracking in a way that made him want to crawl into the nearest hole and disappear. "I swear to God, I'm trying."

But the words rang false, even to him. He could feel the lie hanging in the air, thick and suffocating,

like a noose tightening around his neck. He couldn't look his father in the eye, not now, not with the truth of it all glaring at him. He was stuck in this endless cycle, and he didn't know how to get out.

There was a long silence, the kind that stretches between people when they know there's nothing left to say, nothing left to fix. Trev shifted uncomfortably, his hands running through his damp hair, wishing he could just vanish.

"I'm sorry," Trev whispered, the words slipping from his lips like the last thread of hope he had left. But even as he said them, he knew it wasn't enough. It would never be enough.

Mr. Wilson shook his head slowly, the movement deliberate, almost as if he were trying to shake off the weight of it all. "Sorry doesn't fix it, son. Sorry doesn't make up for the damage."

The words landed with a sickening thud in Trev's chest, and for a moment, it felt like the room was spinning. His heart pounded in his ears, and his hands clenched into fists. He wanted to scream, to shout, to let out all the frustration and anger that had been building inside him for so long. But all he could do was stand there, frozen.

“Sorry doesn’t fix it,” Mr. Wilson repeated, his voice colder now, hard like stone. “You’ve broken more than just my trust. You’ve broken this family. And I don’t know how to fix it anymore.”

Trev opened his mouth, but no words came. What could he say? What could he do? His father’s words were like a wall closing in around him, and he felt smaller and smaller, suffocating under the weight of them.

Without another word, he turned and walked toward the door. His father’s voice followed him, but it was too late, he had already made up his mind.

“I’m sorry,” Trev said one last time, his voice barely a whisper. But he knew, deep down, that it was too late. Too late for apologies, too late for redemption. The door creaked open, and then clicked shut behind him with the finality of a door slamming on everything he had ever known.

He walked out into the rain, the cold drops hitting his face, mixing with the tears he refused to let fall. The sound of his father’s voice echoed in his ears, but he didn’t stop, didn’t look back. Not yet.

The storm outside was nothing compared to the storm brewing inside him.

A family fractured

The small kitchen was suffused with the familiar smell of stew, but the warmth from the stove did little to comfort Anne Wilson. She sat at the table, her hands wrapped tightly around a chipped cup of tea, watching the steam rise like a ghost between her trembling fingers. It had been weeks, but the ache in her chest, the one that had settled there when they first learned about Trev's addiction, had only grown stronger. The tea had cooled in her cup long ago, but she hadn't noticed. All she could hear now was the endless pacing of her husband in the next room, his footsteps echoing like a warning.

William's movements were sharp, restless. He would stop by the window, staring out into the darkening street for a few moments before turning back to pace again. He never spoke, not at first. Anne knew what he was thinking: the same things they'd been saying for months. But it never felt easier to hear. Each time he spoke, it felt like the weight of his words would break her.

"It's just the same damn thing every day," William's voice cut through the silence, his words as rough and jagged as broken glass. He stood near the window now, his hand gripping the back of the chair like he was holding on for dear life. "He can't be helped."

Anne's fingers tightened around the cup, her knuckles pale against the ceramic. She hated this, hated the helplessness, the anger, the guilt. She knew the burden William carried, but it didn't make the weight any easier to bear. The desperation in his voice made her stomach twist. She had heard him say it more than once, but it never sounded any less like a death sentence.

Her voice was shaky when she finally spoke, but she forced the words out. "He's our son, William. We can't just give up on him."

William's face twisted into something between a scowl and a grimace, the lines on his face deepening as his frustration boiled over. He whipped around to face her, his fists clenched at his sides. "We've tried everything, Anne. Everything." His voice was low, dangerous. "We've given him chances. We've talked, we've begged, we've given him everything we have. And look where we are. Look where *he* is." He punctuated the words with a gesture toward the living room, toward the empty space where their son should have been but was never home.

Anne's heart sank, the weight of his words hitting her like a physical blow. She thought of Trev, the boy who had once been full of promise, full of life. The boy who had once smiled at her as they sat around the dinner table, talking about his dreams, his future. And now... now, that same boy had become a stranger, slipping further and further from them with each passing day. She could still see him, his face hollowed out, eyes distant, lost to something they couldn't reach.

Her throat tightened, the tears welling up and threatening to spill. She blinked hard, forcing them back. She wouldn't cry. Not yet. "He's not gone yet. He's still our son."

William's shoulders slumped, the fight draining out of him as he looked down at the floor, his chest rising and falling with a deep, heavy breath. For a moment, it looked like he might collapse under the weight of his own defeat. The world outside the window blurred as he spoke again, quieter this time, the edges of his voice fraying. "We're losing him, Anne." His voice cracked on the words, and the sound of it tore through her heart like a blade. "We're losing him, and I don't know how to fix it."

Anne's heart was breaking. It was a slow, agonizing breaking, like the walls around her crumbling into dust, leaving her exposed and vulnerable. She pushed herself out of the chair, the legs scraping against the floor but she didn't care. She crossed the room quickly, her bare feet silent against the worn wood. She reached out and touched his arm, her hand warm against the coldness of his skin. The tension in his muscles was like iron, but he didn't pull away.

"William," she whispered, her voice soft and fragile. "We've been through worse. We've fought for so much. We can't stop now."

He looked at her then, his eyes red-rimmed and weary, the exhaustion written across his face like a scar. "I don't know how much more I can take, Anne.

Every time I look at him, I see a piece of myself slipping away." He swallowed hard, his hands trembling as he placed them on the table in front of him. "Every time I try to talk to him, to help him, it's like I'm speaking to a ghost. He doesn't hear me. He doesn't care."

Anne stepped closer, wrapping her arms around him in a gentle embrace, as if she could hold the world together with the strength of her own love. "You're not losing him. Not yet." Her words felt weak even as they left her mouth, but she had to say them. For both of them. For herself. "We just have to find him again. We'll find him, William. We will."

He shook his head slowly, his face buried in her hair. "I wish I could believe that, Anne. I wish I could. But every day feels like I'm watching him slip farther into something I can't reach. I don't know how much longer we can keep doing this."

Anne pulled back slightly, her hand cradling his face, forcing him to look at her. She saw the man she had married in his eyes, strong, determined, but broken. A man who had spent his life providing for them, who had worked tirelessly to build the small life they had. A man who now felt like he was losing everything.

"Then we keep trying," she said firmly, her voice full of quiet resolve. "You can't give up. Not now. Not when we're so close. He's our son, William. And no matter how far gone he is, he's still part of us. We can still bring him back."

William's lips trembled, the anger and frustration giving way to something else, something softer. He pulled her close, holding her as if she were the last anchor in a storm. His breath hitched against her shoulder, and for the first time in months, Anne felt the weight of his burden lift, just a little.

"I don't know how, Anne," he murmured into her hair. "But I'll keep fighting. I'll fight until I can't anymore."

Anne held him tighter, her heart heavy with the knowledge that she didn't have all the answers. She didn't know how they would fix this, how they would save their son but she knew one thing for certain: they couldn't give up. Not now. Not when they had already come this far.

"We'll do it together," she whispered, her voice steady despite the knot in her throat. "We'll fight for him, William. Together."

And in that moment, surrounded by the quiet storm outside and the silence of their own house, they both held on to each other with everything they had left.

But deep inside, Anne knew it wasn't just Trev they were fighting for anymore. It was their family. It was everything that had once been whole, and now seemed so fragile, so broken. And if they didn't find a way to put the pieces back together, if they couldn't reach their son, there would be nothing left.

The breaking point

The night had settled over the small town, its heavy silence blanketing everything in a suffocating hold. Inside the Wilson home, the low hum of the refrigerator was the only sound that seemed to rise above the tension hanging thick in the air. Outside, the crickets sang, oblivious to the storm that raged within the four walls of the family grocery store.

It was late when Trev stumbled through the door, his footsteps unsteady and dragging. His eyes were hollow from sleepless nights, his face gaunt, like a shadow of the boy he had once been. The addiction, the lies, the overwhelming weight of failure, pressed down on him like a thousand bricks. He barely noticed the doorbell's faint chime as it echoed through the store, signalling his arrival.

Behind the counter, Mr. Wilson stood, methodically restocking cans with mechanical precision. The man's back was stiff, as always, the weight of the world, a weight that had once seemed so manageable, now sinking his shoulders deeper, making every movement slower, more deliberate.

Trev's footsteps faltered as he neared the back of the store, the air thick with the unspoken. His father's presence, once a comforting anchor, now felt like a looming storm cloud, something dangerous, something just on the verge of breaking. His throat felt tight, his body suddenly feeling foreign, too heavy, too awkward for the world that felt more distant with each passing day.

"Where have you been?" Mr. Wilson's voice cut through the silence, a quiet but sharp accusation. The tone was low, but the anger beneath it was clear, like the calm before a thunderstorm.

Trev swallowed hard, his heart pounding in his chest. He could barely meet his father's eyes, the weight of the words he had to say sinking him further into the pit of despair. "I..." he began, but his voice cracked, betraying him, the words catching in his throat.

"I don't want excuses, son," Mr. Wilson snapped, his gaze icy, his brow furrowing as he took a step toward Trev. The anger, the disappointment—he couldn't hide it anymore. Not even for his son. "Where have you been? Out there... destroying yourself. You think I don't see it? You think I haven't been watching?"

Trev's hands trembled, and he could feel the heat rising in his face, the shame making him burn. He wanted to run. He wanted to scream, to shout back, to say something that would make this moment stop. But all he could do was stand there, crushed beneath the weight of his father's gaze, the accusations swirling around him like a noose tightening around his throat.

"I don't know," he whispered, his voice so faint it barely reached his own ears. He looked down at the floor, as if the cracked tiles might provide some kind of answer, some kind of escape. "I don't know anymore…"

Mr. Wilson's fists clenched at his sides, his jaw grinding with frustration. "Don't lie to me, boy," he growled, his voice darkening. "Stop lying to me. You've been out there on those streets—chasing the same damn thing every day. The booze, the pills, whatever you can get your hands on. I've watched it,

Trev. Watched you slip away from me, watched you slip away from *us*."

The last word *us* struck like a slap across Trev's face, his heart twisting with something that wasn't anger, but something worse. Something cold, like fear. Fear of what he had become, fear of what he was doing to his family.

His mind raced, but his body betrayed him. His legs wobbled, and before he could stop it, the world tipped forward. He sank to the floor in a heap, his knees giving out beneath him. He didn't even feel the sharpness of the cold tile against his skin. All he felt was the crushing weight of his father's words, the suffocating guilt that had been building for months, the bitter knowledge that he had failed them all.

"I'm sorry…" Trev's voice broke, small and hoarse, as the tears he had held back for so long finally spilled over. He curled in on himself, his face buried in his hands. "I'm so sorry, Dad. I didn't mean to… I didn't mean to do this to you. To Mom. To us."

But his father was silent now. The anger was gone, replaced by something darker, something that chilled the room more than the November wind that howled outside. Mr. Wilson stood there for a long moment,

his face unreadable. The hard lines of disappointment that had etched themselves onto his features seemed to settle deeper, harder than ever before.

"I've heard that word a thousand times, Trev," he said quietly, almost to himself. "Sorry doesn't mean a damn thing anymore."

Trev's heart dropped. It was as if the ground beneath him had disappeared, leaving him with nothing to hold on to. He could feel his father's judgment in the air, feel it weighing on him like the crushing weight of his failures.

"I can't help you if you won't help yourself," Mr. Wilson continued, his voice calm now, distant. The sharp edge of his anger had dulled, leaving only emptiness in its wake. "I've given you everything. I've tried, damn it. I've tried to keep this place running, to keep things normal. But I can't do it alone, Trev. I can't fix you."

Trev's eyes stung with the force of his father's words, but he couldn't bring himself to look up. He stayed there, hunched on the floor, his body trembling with the weight of the shame, the guilt that clung to him like a second skin.

"I don't know how to stop, Dad…" he whispered, his voice raw, barely a breath against the heavy air between them. His chest heaved with silent sobs. "I don't know how."

His father's face softened for just a moment, the hardness of his features faltering, but it was brief—so brief that Trev wasn't sure he had imagined it. He watched as Mr. Wilson turned away, his back to him now, his hands pressed against the counter in a futile attempt to hold himself together.

"I don't know how either," Mr. Wilson muttered. The words were thick with defeat, hanging heavy in the room. "But you better figure it out soon, or you're going to lose everything. You're going to lose us."

Trev wanted to say something, to reach out, to fix it, but the words wouldn't come. There was no way to make it right, no way to change the truth. He had broken his father's heart, and now, there was nothing left but the shattered pieces between them.

And for the first time in months, Trev truly believed it, he was alone.

The silent divide

The days had blurred together, melting like the horizon under a hot, unforgiving sun. Trev's addiction had slowly carved him out of everything he had once been, leaving behind a hollow shell of a man. The grocery store, once the heartbeat of the Wilson family, was a mere shadow of itself. The shelves, which used to hum with the rhythm of daily commerce, now sat stagnant. The cash register, once a symbol of pride for Mr. Wilson, had gone silent for hours on end.

Trev wandered the aisles like a ghost, his steps slow and dragging, his eyes unfocused. The world outside seemed too loud, too vibrant for him to process, and so he retreated deeper into his fog. It wasn't that he

didn't care. It wasn't that he didn't understand the damage he was doing. But somewhere along the way, the weight of it all had become unbearable. And so, he numbed himself. Numbed his body. Numbed his soul.

Inside their small house, everything was changing. His father, once a tower of strength, had begun to wither under the strain of running a business on the brink of collapse while his son fell further into the abyss. Mr. Wilson's back had started to bend under the weight of his years, his steps had slowed, and his once-clear eyes were clouded with worry. Every morning, Anne Wilson stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the faded apron she had worn for years, and wondered if the woman who smiled at her from the reflection still existed. Her smile had become a distant memory, a relic from a time before Trev's addiction had taken hold. The smile of a woman who believed in her family. A woman who believed in her son.

One afternoon, when the house was unusually quiet, Anne went into Trev's room to clean, a task she had avoided for weeks. The air was thick with the scent of stale beer and cigarettes, a stench that had seeped into every corner of the house. She reached

under the pillow to straighten the sheets and froze. There, tucked haphazardly beneath the pillow, was a letter.

Her breath caught in her throat as she picked it up, the paper worn and crinkled. The envelope was from the rehabilitation center, the same place they had begged Trev to go, the same place they had hoped, prayed, for him to seek help. The letter had been dated a week ago, though it might as well have been from a lifetime ago. She stared at the words, as though if she stared long enough, they might change. Might mean something else.

A sudden sob wracked her body, and she sank onto the bed, clutching the letter to her chest. The letter from the center told them that a bed was available, a chance, a lifeline, really for Trev to begin again. But she had heard the same thing a dozen times before, each time with less hope, each time with more silence from her son.

The tears fell freely now. She didn't know if it was because she was exhausted, or because the sight of her son's name, his once-strong name, now reduced to something fragile, was too much to bear.

The door creaked open, and she looked up to see

William standing in the doorway, his face worn with worry and age. His hand gripped the doorframe, and for a moment, he just stared at his wife.

Anne didn't need to speak. The letter in her hands said it all. It was the final blow. The words that they had been afraid to face, yet they had known, deep down, would come.

"Anne," William said, his voice low and rough. "What did you..."

She cut him off, her voice trembling. "It's from the rehab center," she whispered, holding up the letter. "A bed is available, just as they promised. But it's been a week, William. A week… and he hasn't said a word."

William's eyes hardened. The usual calmness in his demeanour gave way to something darker, something simmering beneath the surface. The man who had been steady, dependable, was now a storm ready to break. He walked into the room, his hands clenched into fists at his sides.

"We can't wait any longer," Anne whispered, the weight of her own words suffocating her. "I don't know how much longer I can watch him fall apart like this. I don't know if there's anything left of him."

William took the letter from her hands, his expression unreadable. His heart ached to see the woman he loved in such despair. And in that moment, he couldn't help but feel a sharp pang of guilt. He should have done more. He should have taken action sooner. But it had been hard to see the son he had raised, the son who had once been so full of promise—fall into this abyss.

"I'm going to get him," William said, his voice firm, like the steel that had once forged the foundation of their family. "I'm going to get my son back. I've put this off long enough."

Anne shook her head, wiping away her tears. "We've been waiting for him to want it, William. But what if he doesn't want it? What if he's too far gone?"

"We're *not* giving up on him." William's voice was sharp now, but it was the pain in his eyes that made Anne's heart break. "I *can't* give up on him."

Her hands trembled as she looked at him. "But what if we're too late?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. "What if he's already lost?"

"We don't know that, Anne," William said, his tone softening. He sat beside her on the bed, taking her

hand in his. "We don't know that. And I'm not going to let it happen. Not while I'm still breathing."

Anne looked into his eyes, searching for some sign of hope, some indication that they could still pull their son from the darkness. She saw it there, faint and flickering like the last embers of a fire, but it was enough. Just enough.

She nodded slowly. "I'll be here, William. I'll wait."

"I know you will," he replied, squeezing her hand. His voice hardened again, as he stood. "But it's time for him to face the truth. And this time, he won't have a choice."

* * * * * * * * * * *

Later that evening, as the sky darkened and the first stars began to glimmer like cold, distant eyes, William drove toward the small apartment where Trev had been hiding himself away. He could feel the tension building in his chest, every thud of his heart a reminder of what he was walking into. He wasn't sure what to expect when he knocked on the door. Would Trev be angry? Would he try to run again? The questions swirled around in his mind, but there was only one answer, one thing that mattered.

He had to try.

He had to save him.

William parked the truck, its engine humming softly in the stillness of the evening. He stared at the door for a long moment, his fingers tight around the steering wheel. Then, with a deep breath, he got out.

The streetlights flickered overhead, casting shadows across the cracked pavement as he made his way up to the door. His hand hovered for a moment before knocking, the sound loud and sharp in the otherwise quiet night.

There was a long pause before the door creaked open.

Trev stood there, his face pale, his eyes bloodshot, but there was a flicker of recognition in his gaze.

"Dad…" Trev's voice was hoarse, a whisper caught in the chasm of years gone wrong.

"I'm taking you home, son," William said, his voice low but resolute. "We're going to fix this. I'm not leaving you here."

Trev hesitated, his eyes darting away as though searching for an escape. But there was no escape from the truth now, and deep down, he knew it.

"I can't go," he whispered, his shoulders slumping. "I'm too far gone."

William reached out, his hand steady on Trev's shoulder. "You're not too far gone. We're going to fix this, together. You hear me?"

Trev didn't respond right away. But as he looked into his father's eyes, something flickered—something small, something fragile, but it was there. And for the first time in a long time, Trev felt a tiny spark of hope.

"I don't know if I can do it," he said softly, his voice breaking.

"I'll be right beside you," William promised, his voice unwavering. "And we'll take it one step at a time."

And with that, William guided his son out into the night, the weight of the world pressing against their shoulders—but for the first time in what felt like an eternity, they were walking together again.

The hope of tomorrow

The evening air was thick with the weight of impending change, the kind of change that had been longed for but feared just the same. It was a time when everything seemed to hang in the balance, the past, the present and the future, caught like the last remnants of daylight before the night descended.

William Wilson sat outside the rehabilitation center, his hands tightly gripped around the steering wheel of his truck, his knuckles white with strain. The tires had worn ruts in the cracked asphalt, but he hardly noticed. The world around him had become a blur of muted colours, as if the universe itself un-

derstood the gravity of the moment and had muted its brightness in respect. His eyes, though tired and bloodshot from sleepless nights, remained fixed on the door ahead of him.

How many times had he sat like this? How many nights had he waited for a sign? For a miracle? The years of worry, of sleepless nights spent beside Anne as they listened to the rattling of the house and the echo of Trev's silence, weighed on him. He had made promises to his wife, promises to his son but now, in this moment, in this place where all of those promises seemed to have been broken, he could only pray for something more.

The door to the center creaked open.

William's heart nearly stopped. There, standing in the dimming light of the evening, was Trev.

His son was thinner, gaunter than the young man he had been just a few months ago, and yet there was something in the way he stood that was different. The usual defiance, the anger that always seemed to linger just beneath the surface, had disappeared. His eyes, once so filled with bitterness, had softened. It was as if the walls he had built up over years of fear and pain had begun to crumble.

William's breath hitched in his throat.

Trev stood still for a moment, his gaze fixed on the ground. When he finally looked up, his eyes met his father's, and there was something fragile in them, something raw, but unspoken. He was holding onto something that William couldn't quite name, but it was there, small but persistent.

"I'm ready, Dad," Trev said, his voice barely above a whisper.

William felt the weight in his chest, the years of longing and heartbreak, as if the words themselves had unlocked something deep within him. His son, his stubborn, broken son, was standing in front of him, not with the venom of rebellion, but with the quiet resignation of someone who knew how much was at stake.

The enormity of the moment hit him all at once. His breath caught, and for a fleeting second, he thought he might collapse right then and there. But he didn't. He straightened up in his chair, a sense of strength suddenly returning to him.

And then, he smiled. It wasn't a grand smile, not the kind of smile that would light up a room, but a

small, tentative curve of his lips. It was the smile of a man who had spent too many nights on the edge of despair, waiting for something that might pull him back from the abyss. And now, standing before him, was that something.

"Are you sure?" William's voice was thick with emotion, the words carrying the weight of years.

Trev hesitated, his eyes flickering as if searching for something in the darkness of the world around him. His shoulders slumped for a moment, as though he might collapse under the pressure of his own vulnerability. But then, he nodded, his voice steady, though it trembled with the faintest hint of fear.

"I'm sure. I want to try. I can't keep living like this."

William's heart broke at the simplicity of the words. It wasn't the grand declaration he had hoped for, the triumphant speech about victory over addiction or the redemption of a son. It was raw. It was real. And it was enough.

Trev stepped forward slowly, as if testing the ground beneath him. He had taken the first step, and for the first time in years, William believed it might be the right one.

He stood and walked toward his son, his hand outstretched. The moment was fragile, too fragile, almost but William couldn't deny the hope that was beginning to swell in his chest.

"Come on, son," he said softly, his voice trembling as he reached for Trev's hand. "Let's go home."

Trev didn't hesitate this time. He took his father's hand with the same tentative trust that he had shown in the rehabilitation center. He didn't have the answers. He didn't know what the future held, but he was here. He was trying. And that was all that mattered.

They walked together toward the truck, the first few steps tentative, like the beginning of something uncertain, but the ground firming under them with each stride. As William opened the passenger door for his son, he paused, looking back at the center where they had spent so many painful hours, and then to the darkening sky above them. The clouds had parted just enough to allow a faint sliver of moonlight to shine through, casting its pale light over the world below.

It was as if the world itself was holding its breath, waiting.

Trev climbed into the truck, and William slid in beside him. The engine rumbled to life, the sound a reassuring thrum beneath them. As they pulled away from the center, William glanced over at his son, his heart in his throat.

There was a silence between them, a heavy, comfortable silence that spoke volumes without words. It wasn't the end. Not yet. But it was a beginning. A beginning they had both longed for. The road ahead was uncertain, and there would be more struggles to face. But for the first time in what felt like a lifetime, William allowed himself to believe.

He glanced at Trev again, his voice quiet but steady.

"We'll take it one day at a time."

Trev nodded, his hand resting against the door, his fingers curled tightly around the edge. He didn't need to say anything else. He didn't have the words to explain the battle raging inside him—the fight against the darkness he had lived in for so long. But as the truck rolled on into the night, Trev finally felt a flicker of something he had long since forgotten. It wasn't hope not yet, not fully. But it was a glimmer. And it was enough.

For now, it was enough.

And somewhere, far in the distance, a new dawn was waiting to rise.

The End

The fruits of a family's descent

Leni Korhonen

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LENI KORHONEN

Leni Korhonen. Left calculus and part of my life for three kids and a divorce but writing never left me it's just took a few decades till i decide to expose it further than my notebooks and my computer. For best or worst it works cathartically for me.

The fruits of a family's descent

Trev shrugged, his fingers flicking nervously with the lighter in his pocket.